

## **The Platonic Meta-Imports in Luigi Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author.**

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Though Plato's aim in the seventh and tenth books of *The Republic* was to expose a false world of shadows that must be abandoned for the real world, still his influence on drama, ancient and modern, and its theory is immensely there. His cave parable, itself a dramatic rendition of ideas, is perhaps the first well established theory of drama and dramaturgy. What is more, the drama and theory of the cave has become the medium for what is called *metatheatre*. Metatheatre turns out to be a marking of modernism in art and literature, and complex phenomenon that addresses issues related to philosophy, communication, epistemology, and aesthetic. Metatheatre is full of ideas comparable to Plato's which give the audience the mutations of truth when they should look for answers themselves.

The aim of this paper is to approach Luigi Pirandello's work which is replete with the above Platonic philosophical and dramatic meta-imports. His drama entices the audience to open their eyes to realities through showing them something that is completely made up. In *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, he tries to re-enact the play of the shadows of Plato's cave. He explores the nature of theatrical processes by making his character escape from life into form and from form into reality.

## Introduction: Poetics of Metadrama

Mostly, the antagonism between philosophy and theatre has stirred by Plato who attacks theater and regards it as a place of illusion. But nowadays one can find that Plato is a theorist of drama, if not a dramatist himself. From the outset, his theories show that theater and philosophy have been intertwined by the drama of ideas.

Plato's parable of the Cave in book VII of *The Republic* has had a profound impact on the relation between philosophy and theatre. First, it is believed that his philosophy's impact is negative and an "anti-theatrical prejudice."<sup>1</sup> However, dramatists have returned to Plato's cave with a very different set of interests. Plato's ideas lead "many contemporary literary theorists [to] argue that Plato's theory of art as imitation served to first introduce a theory of literature to the Western world."<sup>2</sup> The voice in the cave, the gothic shadow, and the suggestion of life in an underground prison is itself a creation of a dramatic imagination.

In the renowned cave scene, Plato divides the world into two parts: the world of being (like the utopian world) and the world of becoming. The world of being has a perfect idea of life. To Plato, the world of being is the real life, while the material world is just an illusion. Plato sums up his view in an image of ignorant humanity trapped in a cave. (*The Republic*, VII 514b). The cave is inhabited by several prisoners. All the prisoners have been chained down since their childhood. They cannot move their hands, legs or even their heads. All they are able to do is gaze in the front of a wall. Behind the prisoners, there is a fire and between the fire and prisoners is a walkway. On this walkway, people walk carrying figures of different types of animals, men and other objects on their heads. Owing to the fact that the raised walkway is between motionless

prisoners and fire, shadows of people walking are reflected on the rocks in front of the prisoners. Furthermore, they hear the walking of people and imagine that noise is produced by shadows. Jonathan Pitches points out that Plato here "makes the connection with performance explicit for the wall is like the screen at puppet shows between the operators and their audience, above which they show their puppets."<sup>3</sup>

Upon having an access to what is outside the cave, one of the prisoners discovers the reality and the origin of everything.

Imagine once more, I said, such a one coming suddenly out of the sun  
To be replaced in his old situations; would he not be certain  
To have his eyes full of darkness?

(*The Republic*, Book VII, 350)

It is believed that this prisoner is sick and needs someone to heal him.<sup>4</sup> First, his world is shadow-like and he cannot recognize the truth and the unhidden or shadows. After spending more time outside the cave, he can distinguish between shadows and real things. He decides to return to the cave with "an eye for *being*,"<sup>5</sup> and he can now recognize why the prisoners cannot distinguish the shadows as shadows. The Platonic dialogue thus goes:

This means that he who has been filled with the illuminating view for the being of beings will make known to the cave-dwellers his thoughts on what they, down there, take for beings. He can only do this if he remains true to himself in his liberated stance. He will report what he sees in the cave from the standpoint of his view of essence. What does he *perceive* in this way? *He understands the being of beings; in perceiving the idea he therefore knows what belongs to a being and to its unhiddenness. He can therefore decide whether something, e.g. the sun, is a being, or whether it is only a reflection in water; he can decide whether something is shadow or real thing.*<sup>6</sup>(Italics mine)

The prisoner's ability to realize the truth or the being makes the "others" misunderstand him because they are only seeing the shadowy

representation of reality. As a result, a re-reading of Plato's work might prove the idea that both philosophy and theatre are asking the same question concerning the nature of existence and the search for meaning in a world without absolutes.

Plato's view of art in *The Republic* was to inform his society that art serves to shape character and educate it. Hence, art must be strictly under control. Furthermore, Plato believed that art is a copy of a copy, and that art work imitates the real while the real thing is only an imitation of an idea which is what Plato called "the really real."<sup>7</sup> To argue further, M. A. R. Habib states that

Plato's point is that people who have known only these shadows will take them for realities: if they were forced to stand up and turn around, they would, at first dazzled by the light coming into the entrance of the cave, be unable to see the objects whose shadows they had previously seen. Indeed, they would insist that those shadows were more real. If they were now forced to ascend the road, which was 'rough and steep,' they would be yet more blinded. After habituating themselves to the new light, however, they would gradually discern the shadows and reflections of the real objects and eventually would be able "to look upon the sun".<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the metaphor of the cave shows Plato's view about the cognitive situation of human beings. Critics believe that Plato draws a distinction between knowledge which is certain and mere true opinion.<sup>9</sup> He believes that knowledge could only be derived from the changeless and perfect world of the forms, and that anything derived from the changeable and uncertain world of sensation is mere opinion as demonstrated by the prisoners in the allegory of the cave.

Debatably, the matrix of metatheatre has already been there in Plato's drama/theory of the cave. It is worth noting that Metatheatre has always served as a way for theater to reflect upon itself, but in modern

drama, this self-reflection has developed a critical edge. Many modern dramatists turned to Plato as a source of inspiration. According to Lionel Abel, 'metatheatre' is an accurate term describing the form possible to the contemporary playwright who wishes to treat a subject seriously with the multiple layers of illusion.<sup>10</sup> In Plato's idiom, one might say that modern theater makers are keenly aware that they operate within a cave. Thus, they turn around the theater itself, reorienting it so that it might serve as a vehicle for truth. Abel also believes that Greek tragedy which described grief and delight is impracticable today. He confirms that tragedy was impossible in the late Renaissance and the playwrights like Calderon and Shakespeare who knew nothing about metatheatricality or dramatic self-reflexivity, wrote 'serious' plays which were self-reflexive themselves.<sup>11</sup>

Euripides's *The Bacchae* constitutes the supreme example of tragic metatheatre. Here the god Dionysus disguises himself as a man. Typically, the actor who represents the god Dionysus is wearing more than one mask and "projects the persona of someone projecting a persona."<sup>12</sup> In his book, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* Charles Segal confirms that this play breaks down the oppositions between illusion and reality, self and other, stage and representation. These oppositions present a drama about drama or, in Segal's words, a play that reflects "on the theatricality and illusion-inducing power of ... [Euripides's] own work."<sup>13</sup> Obviously, the seeds of Euripides's awareness of the stage as a place of reality and illusion can be found afterward in Luigi Pirandello's mind.<sup>14</sup> Another work which should be remembered as a premium example of metatheater is Pedro Calderon's *Life's a Dream* (1638), a play that depicts the problem of the infant prince Segismundo who grows up in prison - essentially another cave - being kept from the outside world. When he is given his rightful place, he takes it all to be a dream. For the time being, he becomes a violent

oppressor who kills and rapes without reasons, only to find himself transferred back to the prison whence he came. Here is Segismundo summarizing his dilemma:

Look at me, once again prisoner of my fortune. And since I know that this life is all a dream, be gone, shadows, you who today feign bodies and voices before my deadened senses when I know you have no body or voice. For I don't want counterfeit majesty and splendor, no! Fanciful illusions that unravel at the slightest touch of a breeze—just like the budding almond tree whose flowers, without warning and ignoring counsel, bloom early and expire at the first cold wind, withering and tarnishing the beauty, light, and color of their rosy bonnets—I see you, I recognize you, and I know you play the same game with everyone who sleeps. I won't be fooled this time, for I've learned the truth and know that life is a dream.

**Segismundo (III,I,2260-70)**

It becomes evident that these two classical plays end with violence, like the story of the Platonic cave that ends up with him returning to the cave and is greeted with laughter and threat of death.

Similar scenes of the dark world occur in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. A prisoner in his own cave, Hamlet believes that life is a prison "in which there are many/confines, wards and dungeons, [here] being one/o'th'worst" (II.ii.256-8) and so he decides to remember the ghost and follow his order. He continues saying that his life is like a prison. In torment, he laments his father's death and the hasty marriage of his mother. He reveals that his grief is so great and nobody can understand it. His eyes and his face are only mirror of this grief. Like the journey of the prisoner to knowledge, he declares that he is "too much i' the sun" (I, ii, 67). Eventually, he thinks of revenge which leads him to madness and murder. Shakespeare here creates a plot that presents a man who does not know how to conduct his life around the demands of others. Plato states in his *The Republic* that almost all works of people are merely imitations

of other works. *Hamlet* seemingly opens with paradoxical reflection, beginning with an instance reminding of Plato's theory of imitation. Bernardo's first line, "Who's there?" (I.i.1), and Francisco's response, "Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself" (I.i.2-3) reflect each other as if they are the side of a mirror. Both of them are guards whose duty is to recognize the people they meet, and yet they run into each other, returning to their original purpose, as reflections.

Hamlet utters the famous line about art which is nothing else but holding up the mirror to nature. He plays the roles of both author and stage manager of a dumb show, *The Murder of Gonzago*, and tells the players to act out the poisoning of a king. He further instructs them to "suit the action to the word, the word to the action," and then dilates on the art of acting itself, "whose end, both at the first and now, was and is hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature" (III.ii,16-17,19-20).

The ironic paradox in *Hamlet* was first noticed by Friedrich Schlegel who believes that the play within the play reveals the hidden truth of the king Claudius. Accordingly, there was a line between truth and appearance, which forces the audience to see the realities on different levels. This kind of drama brings the breakdown of the audience's suspension of disbelief. Schlegel confirms in his "romantic irony" that poetry should always be meta-poetry, and drama meta-drama. He calls art's self-reflection an "irony". He posits:

Every poem should be genuinely romantic, and every poem should be didactic in that broader sense of the word that designates the tendency toward a deep, infinite meaning. Additionally, we make this demand everywhere, without necessarily using this name. Even in very popular genres the theater, for example we demand irony; *we demand that the events, the people, in short, the whole game of life actually be taken up and presented as a game as well.*<sup>15</sup> (Italics mine)

In the footsteps of Shakespearean Metatheatre, Schlegel discovered the trick of self-reflexivity. He confirms that the writer after finishing his work should look at his creative process and criticize it. After doing this action, the work will reflect all the writer's activities. This self-mirroring power will allow the work to present itself as self-reflexive which reveals its nature as well as the writer's mind at work.

In the shadows of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and his institutional idiom of "the world's a stage" (*As You Like It*, II, vii, 139) Bertolt Brecht, the quasi-Platonic, claims that modern theater is Platonic and non-Aristotelian, since Plato developed the theory of drama before Aristotle.<sup>16</sup> In his epic theatre, Brecht tries to break the audience's realistic illusion onstage and remind them of the artificiality of the theatrical techniques summed up under the naming of *Verfremdung*, or alienation effect (A-effect). Creating this effect entails the use of such theatricalities as the half-curtain and captions, among others. He also wants his audience to see that the performance is not magic, but work. Thus, theatre nowadays is no longer "a magic circle",

For its text, the performance is no longer a virtuoso interpretation, but its rigorous control. For its performance, the text is no longer a basis of that performance, but a grid on which, in the form of new formulations, the gains of that performance are marked. For its actor, the producer no longer gives him instructions about effects, but theses for comment. For its producer, the actor is no longer a mime who must embody a role, but a functionary who has to make an inventory of it.<sup>17</sup>

Following the prisoner's suit, people in life behave in a like manner. Each one has his ideas or beliefs which are shaped and mediated by the thoughts of others in society and believes that he is living in a real world. However, this reality is also an illusion. Unlike Hamlet who is depicted as being "too much I' the sun", people are afraid of changing



themselves. What most of them are able to perceive are the imperfect and distorted reflections of reality. This is similar to the ontological value that many people today attribute to movie- and television-images, as well as to those internet-images that occupy computer screens as if they were reality.

Since Plato's strong presentation of the worlds of the cave (shadows- non-physical- invisible worlds), two traditions of what humans are (ontology) and how they know the world (epistemology) have appeared and are still essential in the transition from modernism to postmodernism.<sup>18</sup> But the modern epistemology is the opposite of Platonic epistemology, where knowledge can only be derived from sensation and all matters rational are merely opinion. Modern epistemology studies the nature of knowledge and how man knows what he knows and instead of relying on one approach to knowing. The epistemological pluralism is supported by many scholars, since it exploits multiple ways of knowing. The postmodernist stand is characterized by Jean Francois Lyotard's definition of the postmodernity as "incredulity towards meta-narratives"<sup>19</sup>; which is an attitude that opposes all-encompassing system of truth. Furthermore, the idea of any stable or permanent reality disappears. There are only surfaces, without depth; only signifiers, with no signified. According to Jean Baudrillard, in postmodern society there are no originals, only copies-or what he calls "simulacra." In painting or sculpture, for example, where there is an original work, there might also be thousands of copies, but the original is the one with the highest value. CDs and music recordings are not "original." There are millions of copies that are all the same. Another version of Baudrillard's "simulacrum" would be the concept of virtual reality, a reality created by simulation, for which there is no original. This is particularly evident in computer games.<sup>20</sup>

To a larger extent, modern theatre is based on the concept that drama could show universal truths and narrative. It suggests that truth can be managed through formal devices like plot, cause and effect, and character development. In postmodern theatre, however, there are many viable mutations of truth, depending on the perspectives.

### **Meta-Imports in *Six Characters in Search of an Author***

Like Shakespeare and Brecht, Luigi Pirandello questions the nature of what is real, and what is fictive. He is by far one of the modernist mentors of meta-theatre or meta-drama. Robert Brustein argues that Pirandello "is one of the most subjective dramatists in the modern theatre, and certainly the most self-conscious."<sup>21</sup> His plays *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *Tonight We Improvise*, and *When One is Somebody* are classic modernist paradigms of meta-drama which helped form the self-conscious art and theory in the twentieth-century.

Pirandello is described as a dramatist of illusion and reality as well as the dramatist of relativism. Through his "device of physically transplanting an actor from the stage into the auditorium, he obliterated the distinction between fiction and life and abolished the traditional distance that existed between the stage and the spectators."<sup>22</sup> For Pirandello, holding this sense of relativism of both life and theatre brings chaos. This chaos can be controlled only through art.<sup>23</sup> This idea is derived from the theatre critic Adriano Tilgher who believes that the author or the artist should impose a form on changing life. When there is no stability of forms, concepts, and ideals, the result will be terrible.<sup>24</sup>

Incidentally, Pirandello writes:

Life is a continual flux which we try to stop, to fix in stable and determined forms, both inside and outside ourselves .... The forms in which we seek to stop, to fix in ourselves this constant flux are the concepts, the ideals which we constantly want to live up to, all the

fiction we create for ourselves, the conditions, the state in which we tend to stabilize ourselves.<sup>25</sup>

Pirandello's theatrical relativism is also influenced by the Italian Fascism and its aesthetics. He is attracted by the ideal of this aesthetics, Mussolini for that matter. He affirms

Since life is subject to continual change and motion, it feels itself imprisoned by form; it rages and storms and finally escapes from it. Mussolini has shown that he is aware of this double and tragic law of movement and form, and hopes to conciliate the two. Form must not be a vain and empty idol. It must receive life, pulsating and quivering, so that it should be forever recreated. . . . The revolutionary movement inaugurated by Mussolini with the march on Rome and all the methods of his new government seem to me to be, in politics, the necessary realization of just this conception of life.<sup>26</sup>

Echoing Plato's theory of humour,<sup>27</sup> Pirandello believes that the humorist should care about body and its shadow and sometimes he focuses on the shadow more than the body so as to make fun of the body. He agrees with Plato that laughing at ridiculous is mixing pain with pleasure. In an essay titled "On Humour", Pirandello tries to differentiate between comedy and humour. He defines the comic as the "perception of the opposite," while humour is "the feeling of the opposite."<sup>28</sup> Pirandello affirms that the comic writer is provoking laughter by revealing the error of the character while the humorist will reveal the psychological secrets behind the ridiculousness. To support this idea, Pirandello gives an example of an old woman who covers her face with make-up and wears gaudy clothes. In comedy, the audience will laugh at her because she should behave like an old woman while in humour the audience will analyze her character and find the reason behind putting her make-up. Nobody will laugh at her. Instead of laughing, the audience will see the contrary and will feel the opposite.

Pirandello is primarily concerned with appearance and reality. It is always his intellectual explorations that are presented in the plays. He realizes that the action of everyday life is preventing man from being sure even about his own self. "When a man lives," Pirandello says,

he does not see himself; but put a mirror before him and make him see himself in the act of living, under the sway of passions; either he remains astonished and dumb founded at his own experience, or else he turns his eyes so as not to see himself, or else in his disgust he spits at his image, or again clinches his fist to break it: and if he has been weeping, he can weep no more, if he had been laughing he can laugh no more.... in a word, there is a crisis and that crisis is my theatre.<sup>29</sup>

Pirandello here wants people to realize their own reality by explaining the mirror phenomenon. This phenomenon exists in each human being's life. When man is looking at a mirror, he can see his physical appearance not his feeling. Thus, people are like a mirror. They can see only the physical appearance of man and they can know nothing about his real feeling.

With the help of the mirror image, the interaction between the audience and the performing arts will be created and the audience can see the Platonic sun. This sun, as Jacques Derrida observes, will help them to distinguish "the very opposition of appearing and disappearing , ... of day and night, of the visible and the invisible, of the present and the absent " in which is "possible only under the sun."<sup>30</sup> Thus, the audience and throughout the performance can see the self not the other, or perhaps, the performance shows the seer's self as other.

Unlike Ibsen who exploited the fourth wall as a need to get an ending through observation and judgment, Pirandello smashes through it into the audience as if implying that they are part of the performance itself. Any conclusions that the audience reach will also be relating to themselves, or even as Erika Fischer-Lichte puts it, "to refuse to attribute any meaning at all and simply experience the objects presented to them

[The audience] in their concrete being."<sup>31</sup> This is akin to Jacques Lacan's mirror-stage hypothesis that theorizes subject-formation in childhood. Here the child identifies with his image as reflected in the mirror. This image provides him with a confused experience of his real self. Hence, his self-recognition or self-consciousness is, in a sense, misrecognition, since what is seen in the mirror is the ego conceived of as *other*.<sup>32</sup>

Pirandello knows that his drama was not easily understood by the common people and was called "obscure" and "cerebral."<sup>33</sup> Still, he insists on letting people distinguish the kind of the imitations that are introduced in different situations and realize the depth of the intricacies of modern existence. He affirms in his published article "Spoken Action" that the author should depend on people because "the play does not create people, people create a play. Through people, the idea of the play will be born."<sup>34</sup> He also believes that the artist is like a leader who should impose form on a chaotic world. The most successful example of his metatheatrical relativism is Pirandello's play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). In this play, the form is imposed not by the author but by the actors and the director.

*Six Characters in Search of an Author* brought mutinies in the audience who were "not prepared for the play's insistent reversal of theatrical expectations,"<sup>35</sup> but in a short time the play was recognized as a *tour de force*. It was written during the time of disillusionment between the two World Wars. First World War showed the lack of faith that many went through. The play starts with a director who is about to begin a rehearsal of Pirandello's earlier play with a company of actors. The stage is bothered by six people who dash into the stage and state that they are characters from an unwritten play. The writer of the play has abandoned them after he has completed only part of the work. The characters ask the actors to stop the present rehearsal and represent their story instead,

which is full of rancor, passion and charges. What results is a play within a play in which Pirandello mocks at the world of naturalistic drama, as one explores the complex relationship between art and life, looking ahead to the theatre of Brecht, Beckett and Ionesco.

Pirandello's techniques of destroying the passive thoughts of illusion on stage and his creation of real events with stage plot produce the intensification of roles within roles, setting within setting, and realities within realities. Anne Paolucci affirms that theatre plays for Pirandello as "a new art form: embodiments of what might be called a Platonic vision of the ideal form of creative life, or, an Hegelian drama of the absolute movements of spirit."<sup>36</sup> For this reason, his drama is regarded as a new force unleashed to renew both fiction and drama in the years that followed the Pirandelloesque break-through.

The truth of the characters' story opens out when the dialogues begin. The Father marries a peasant woman and has a son from her. However, when he gets bored, he convinces his wife to escape with his male secretary. Over the years, she has three children with the other man, but the son she left behind had become aggressive and violent. The Father becomes interested in his wife again and uses to watch the Step-Daughter on her way to school. One day she and her children move out of city and he loses way of the family. After the death of the secretary, the Mother and her children return to the city and start working in Madame Pace's dress shop. While the Mother is a mender of dresses, the daughter actually works as a high-class prostitute for Madame Pace.

At some point the Father pretends to go to the shop to find a prostitute for himself and starts seducing the daughter. The Step-Daughter knows him very well and wants to get revenge by revealing his shame. Before anything happens, the Mother distinguishes him and stops them. Embarrassed, the Father says he is unaware of the girl's identity. The

Father then indicates that the Son plays a role in the drama as well. The Step-Daughter blames the Son for keeping her out on the streets, but he blames her for showing up and ruining his comfortable life after so many years. The Father tells the Manager that their drama ends with the death of the little girl, the suicide of the young Boy, and the flight of the Step-Daughter.

This family's story has enchanted the Manager who decides that he can make a play out of it. The Father wants him to become the author, telling him that all he has to do is write down whatever they perform. The Manager agrees and takes them into his office to figure out the best way to do it. The other actors think that he has gone mad and are upset with the way the rehearsal has been interrupted.

Pirandello separates the Characters from the Actors who would play their roles. The Characters' costumes show this separation. Their black or grey heavy clothes give them a unique appearance. The appearance of the Mother, for example, with her "wax tears" suggests immortality and endurance. Therefore, and by the use of masks, gestures, costumes, and vocal expressions, Pirandello knows how to create characters more superior than the Actors in their realities. In his 'Preface' to the play, Pirandello explains his creation of the characters and their seeking immortality. He says "If you are a creature of art or of the imagination, your drama is your means of existence. You exist as a character only in the context of, and by reason of, your drama. The drama is the character's *raison d'être*, his vital function; without it he would cease to be."<sup>37</sup>

To put a strict demarcation between the Actors and Characters, Pirandello uses the mask. This mask, as Susan Valeria Harris Smith remarks, shows two concepts: "first man's desire to fix natural flux absolutely into form and, second, the relative nature of perception."<sup>38</sup> Yet,

Pirandello's Characters are complex; a simple mask cannot reflect a complex character. Thus, he decides to imitate Georges Pitoeff's production in 1923 theatre in which he employed heavy white make-up instead of masks. In doing so, Pirandello lets each mask express each Character's basic motivation; the Father's face is a mask registering remorse; the Step-Daughter's, revenge; the Son's, contempt, and the Mother's, sorrow. Pirandello affirms the importance of the Characters masks when he says:

Each man patches up his mask as best he can – the mask he wears in public that is, but within each of us is another which often contradicts our external one. Nothing is true. Oh yes, the sea, a mountain, a rock, a blade of grass – these things are true. But man? Always wearing a mask, unwillingly, unwittingly – a mask of what he believes himself to be: handsome, honourable, elegant, generous, unsuccessful, etc. He cannot ever stop posing and attitudinising over the most trifling events and details – even with himself. And he invents so much and creates so many parts for himself which he needs to believe in and take seriously.<sup>39</sup>

The characters in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* are eager to perform their roles more than finding an author since drama is within them. These characters realize that they are not good at acting and that is why they decide to ask professional actors and director to help them. After the director's approval, they are being allowed to act the scene but the audience should hear everything even their whispers. Any change in their roles or character will betray their story. For this reason, the characters insist on doing the scene themselves. They do not allow the actors to ruin their existence. Throughout this process of changing roles, the Father will be the spokesman or what is called a "Pirandellismo"<sup>40</sup> of the play; he is the one who acts out Pirandello's theories within the play in hand.



FATHER: I only wish to show you that one is born into Life in so many ways, in so many forms .... As a tree, or as a stone; as water or as a butterfly .... Or as a woman. And one can be born a character.

PRODUCER (ironically, feigning amazement): And you together with these people, were born a character?

FATHER: Exactly. And alive as you see. (The PRODUCER and the ACTORS burst out laughing as if at some huge joke.) (Hurt.) I'm sorry that you laugh like that because, I repeat, we carry within ourselves a terrible and grievous drama, as you can deduce for yourselves from this woman veiled in black. (*And so saying, he holds out his hand to the MOTHER and helps her up the last few steps and, continuing to hold her hand, leads her with a certain tragic solemnity to the other side of the stage.*)<sup>41</sup>

The gap between being and seeming is presented by the Characters. Each character has its own mask in this play. The Father's mask represents the Leading Actor; the Step-Daughter's represents the leading actress. The characters' life is static while the actors' dynamic. The actors cannot imitate the characters or play their role and the characters feel disgust with the actors' performance. The Father knows that he is only a character in a work of art and his family has been denied the right to present a play on the stage. He also explains the mirror phenomenon to the Director and the others. But the Father does not know that he is really playing a part in a play called *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Donato Santeramo states that "the Father, from his first appearance, insistently attempts to become simultaneously character, actor, and, most importantly, author of what he believes to be the *true* play."<sup>42</sup> The Father has observed that life is like a stage and each one has a mask which covers his actual face. He affirms also that everyone has a multi-dimensional personality which shows its facets in various different situations.

Each one of us is many persons .... Many persons...according to all the possibilities of being that there are within us.... With some people we are one person.... With others we are somebody quite different: ....And all the time we are under the illusion of always being one and the same person for everybody. (25)

The Father realizes of being a 'real' person in a work of art. While Pirandello thinks himself as an actor or a puppet show in his life.

In one of his letters to his sister in 1886, Pirandello unconsciously showed his loyalty to Platonic thought by telling her that life is a series of shadowy impressions that are mistaken for Reality, and the 'puppet show' imagery is clearly similar to that which Plato employs in *The Republic*:

Meditation is a black abyss populated by dark phantoms, and your desire for light hurls you deeper into intense darkness .... When you finally abandon all ideals because observing that life appears to be nothing more than a puppet show, disjointed, meaningless; when you are devoid of feeling, because you no longer admire or care for men and events when you, in a word, live without life ... then you will not know what to do .... I am like that.<sup>43</sup>

From the speech of the Father, Pirandello shows that art is more alive than life itself. Man is changing and his reality is changing with him. He is like a ghost while the characters in side any artistic works are fixed. The Father believes here that the Character's reality is real, the Actors' is not; while the Character is somebody, man is nobody. Man is nobody because he is subject to time: his reality is momentary, always ready to reveal itself as illusion, whereas the Character's reality remains fixed for eternity. This leads Pirandello to a form of relativity of truth in this show. The Manager confesses that acting creates a perfect illusion of reality and that the stage is not always trying to show truth. He says that their aim is achieved when they are "referring to the illusion that we have to create on this stage ... for the audience." (55) Pirandello here is essentially mocking the hypocrisy with which truth is made to fit the stage and then presented as if it were the real thing.

The Father refers to himself as an example when he tries to justify his actions towards the Step-Daughter and how he had sent his wife to live with another man, and himself taken to Madam Pace's dress-shop. He says that this aspect of his personality witnessed by the Step-Daughter does not reflect his entire personality. He should play the role of the father, but she discovers a part of him that should be hidden away.

The Step-Daughter is against reading the play according to the Father's own words. She wants to seek revenge and that is why she behaves in a cruel way. She tells the company that she even wanted to seduce the writer of the play. The scene between her and the Father in Madam Pace's shop and the same scene which is rehearsed by the Actors heightens the tension between the two realities. When the Actors perform their lines, the characters laugh at them, with the Step-Daughter noting that the dialogue is wrong. She points out, for example, that the actor playing the Father is supposed to say to the actor playing her, "Let's take this little frock off at once, shall we?"(49)

Pirandello used a technique he had inherited from the *Cirque de Soleil*, involving a trapeze hung from the catwalk. Its use during the break as a means to aggravate the audience was undoubtedly innovative. He had had the idea from watching the inhabitants at the mental institution in Switzerland where his wife was recovering.<sup>44</sup> The Swiss hospital was popular for its experimentation and had started a program of gymnastics, which meant to enhance the patients' confidence. The Step-Daughter's raid above the audience's heads, during the break, is a direct reflection of that Swiss therapeutic technique which Pirandello dared to use for the first time in the theatre. Through this technique he killed two birds with a stone when he defined the problem of reality and kept his audience from getting a rest during the break. In this way, the audience could not tell when the play started.

Each character in the play knows what will happen to him and the others. The Mother is present, for instance, when the Father is acting the scene with the Step-Daughter. The Mother's foreknowledge makes her behave passively and refuse to see this scene. The Mother is the only character who is unaware of being a character. She is a peasant woman whose main attribute is that she is an emotional rather than a self-reflective character. This helps to explain her inability to come to terms with her existence as a character; she will try to avoid having the drama performed, without realizing that she cannot escape her role. She cries: "No, it's happening now! It happens all the time! My torment is no pretence, sir. I am alive and I am present always.... At every moment of my torment" (51-2)

Pirandello also deals here with the question of the certainty of reality for the characters. There is a conflict of life versus form, where the characters are conceived as forms. They are imprisoned by the forms into the action they are imagined for, and it is involuntary for them to be what they are. The best example of running from reality is the Son who refuses to play his role in the drama and rejects the Father's and the family's wishes to act. After blaming the Step-Daughter for showing up and ruining his comfortable life after so many years, he tries in a Hamletic manner to escape his form. The Son cannot leave the stage, commenting on the whole endeavor as being only "Literature." (21) He insists, "I am dramatically unrealized character... and I do not feel the least bit at ease in their company. So please leave me out of it." (27) He affirms that he understands the author's intention, which is not to give life to the play.

The sudden outbreak of violence is a common feature of metatheater. It may seem remarkable because it is a turn of theater onto itself, as Abel observes. It fights shy of the pressures of the real world and finds enjoyment in a kind of playful manner in the domain of theater.<sup>45</sup>

In the context of the Platonic cave, Metatheatre tries to let the imprisoned characters use violence in order to break out of their ontological prison. Pirandello here uses violence to answer, or to promise to answer the question which has ontological priority. In *Six Characters*, the Boy commits suicide at the end. This violence enhances the transition of the play from metadrama to tragedy and lets the audience think: "Is it pretence?" Other Actors ask at the end of the play: "Make-believe? Pretence? Reality! Reality! He's dead!"(68)

The ending of Pirandello's play is confusing. The audience will see different realities and should tell the difference between what is real and what is not. Pirandello does not disclose the death of the children until the end. The drowning of the Girl and the suicide of the Boy come as a surprise. When the director calls for lights, the place is flooded with light as if supernatural hand has pulled the switch. This device is repeated when he calls for the lights to be switched off. The lights flood four of the characters while the Boy and the Girl are missing as if they are truly dead.

Plato believes that there is a *Truth*, and it is the duty of a human being to recognize and strive for it, and that one cannot just believe whatever one wants to. His sunlight inspired later philosophers and writers like Pirandello whose works showed the development of the theatre of illusions and the illusion of real life. Like Plato, Pirandello laughed at this life because he knew that this life is absurd and nothing in it is certain except its uncertainty. His play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* gives a brilliant demonstration of the theatrical examination of life and art. It passes on his awareness of the world as a place of masks upon masks into the world of theatre. Man has different identities and he may create whatever image he wants. It is difficult for the audience to know the main story and which is the inner or the outer play. The rehearsal may serve as a frame of the inner or "real" play. This inner play raises the philosophical questions about the truth of existence and matches the doubt in the audience's minds with the stage action.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jonas Barish has summed up this conventional wisdom by coining the term 'anti-theatrical prejudice' in his book *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p.87.

<sup>2</sup> "The Early Origins of Literary Theory: Plato and Aristotle", retrieved from [www.saylor.org/.../ENGL301-The-Early-Origins-of-Lit](http://www.saylor.org/.../ENGL301-The-Early-Origins-of-Lit), p.1 accessed (17,July,2013).

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Pitches, *Science and Stanislavsky tradition of Acting*, (Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group), 2006, p.169.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth: On Plato's Cave Allegory and Theaetetus*. Trans. Ted Sadler. (London: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2002), p.64.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Richard B. Kalter, *The Problem of the Knowledge of God As It is Problematically Related Among Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas*, May, 1960 [www.philosophy-religion.org](http://www.philosophy-religion.org), p.15.

<sup>8</sup> M. A. R. Habib, *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p.22.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Wolenski, Matti Sintonen, and Iikka Nilniluoto, *Handbook of Epistemology*, (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), p.6.

<sup>10</sup> Lionel Abel, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), p.59.

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Davis, "Metatheatre", retrieved from <https://courses.cit.cornell.edu>, Spring 1999, accessed (23, November, 2013) p.1.

<sup>12</sup> Frances M. Dunn, *Mathatheatre and Metaphysics in Two Late Greek Tragedies*, (Santa Barbara: University of California), <http://www.academia.edu>, p.8.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Segal, *Dionysius Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.216.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, "Gespräch über die Poesie," *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe In Hegel and Aesthetics*, ed. William Maker, (New York: New York Press, 2000), p.140.

<sup>16</sup> Brecht's objection to "Aristotelian" theatre was an objection to Goethe's and Schiller's interpretation of it - an objection to:

- catharsis by terror and pity
- identification with the actors
- illusion - the attempt to represent the present event

Brecht's idea of epic is informed by the ideas of Goethe and Schiller regarding the mood and character of epic poetry - this is a rational, calm detachment, to which Brecht aspires as a playwright.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, Translated by Anna Bostock. (London: Verso, 1966), p.2.

<sup>18</sup> Postmodernism is a negative theory and attitude that dismantles the claims to the universal truth held by Enlightenment as well as it opposes the Modernist endeavor of the originality.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?* Trans. Regis Durand. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, 71-82. Trans. Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1984), p. xxiv.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Klages, "Postmodernism", English Department, Boulder: University of Colorado, <http://www.bdavetian.com/Postmodernism.htm>, p.2.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Brustein, *Pirandello: A Collection of Critical Essays*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p.104.

<sup>22</sup> Godwin Okebaram Uwah, *Pirandellism and Samuel Beckett's Plays*, (Maryland: Script Humanistic , 1989), p.9

<sup>23</sup> Pirandello's feeling and his keen sense of sudden reversal is derived from another source as well; Pirandello led a life full of chaos and unsettledness and this had great influence on his works. The source of this chaos was his marriage from a woman he had never seen her before. His wife's lunatic behaviour, her suspicion and then her accusation of Pirandello's insect with their daughter had an effect on his works. This ordeal made him think that "the person is what the other believes him to be" and that "reality is different thing to different people".<sup>23</sup> See John Gassner, *Masters of the Drama*, (New York: Dover Publication, 1940), p.438.

<sup>24</sup> Fiora A. Bassanese , *Understanding Luigi Pirandello*, p. 89.

<sup>25</sup> Pirandello, On Humor, 137; also see the commentary on this passage in Mary Ann Frese Witt, *The Search for Modern Tragedy: Aesthetic Fascism in Italy and France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p.95.

<sup>26</sup> Gaspare Giudice, *Luigi Pirandello: A Biography*, trans. Alastair Hamilton, (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp.145-46

- <sup>27</sup> For further information see John Morreal, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, Albany: University of New York Press, 1983, p.5
- <sup>28</sup> Luigi Pirandello, "On Humour," as quoted in Fiora A. Bassanese, *Understanding Luigi Pirandello*, (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), p.28.
- <sup>29</sup> A. Tilgher, *Voci del Tempo*, "Essay on Pirandello", Rome, 1923 in *Luigi Pirandello*, by Alexander Balaci, (California: University of California Press, 1965), p.170.
- <sup>30</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" in *Postmodernism: Critical Concepts* ed. Charles E. Winquis and Victor E. Taylor, (New York: Routledge: 1998), p.271.
- <sup>31</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Shadow and the Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective*, (Iowa: Iowa University Press, 1997), p.58.
- <sup>32</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1983), p.174.
- <sup>33</sup> Fiora A. Bassanese, *Understanding Luigi Pirandello*, p.60.
- <sup>34</sup> J. L. Styan, *Modern Theory and Practice: Symbolism, Surrealism and the Absurd*, Vol. 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.78.
- <sup>35</sup> J. L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice*, vol. 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.76.
- <sup>36</sup> Anne Paolucci, *Pirandello's Theater: the Recovery of the Modern Stage for Dramatic Art*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), p. 106.
- <sup>37</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *Plays*, "Pirandello's Introduction", Vol.1, (London: One World Classics Ltd., 1996), p.12.
- <sup>38</sup> Susan Valeria Harris Smith, *Masks in Modern Drama*, (California: University of California Press, 1984), p.178.
- <sup>39</sup> A. Richard Sogliuzzo, p. 26.
- <sup>40</sup> Henry Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought*, (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2002), p.388.
- <sup>41</sup> All references to the play are taken from this edition and pagination is parenthetically indicated. Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, trans. Frederick May, (London: Heinemann, Educational Books ltd., 1954), p.9.
- <sup>42</sup> Donato Santeramo, "Pirandello's Quest for truth: Sei Personaggi in Corca d'autore" in *Luigi Pirandello: Contemporary Perspectives*, eds., Gian-Paolo Biasin and Manuela Gieri, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p.45.
- <sup>43</sup> A. Richard Sogliuzzo, *Luigi Pirandello, Director: The Playwright in the Theatre*, (New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1982), p. 3.



<sup>44</sup>Olive Classe (ed.) "Luigi Pirandello 1867-1936 Sicilian dramatist, novelist, short-story writer and theatre director" in *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English*, (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), p.1078.

<sup>45</sup>Stuart Davis, p.

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## ما وراء المعنى الافلاطوني في مسرحية "ستة شخصيات

### تبحث عن مؤلف" للويجي بيراندلو

مدرس / زينب حسون عبد الامير

قسم اللغة الانكليزية/ كلية اللغات

مع ان افلاطون في الفصلين السابع والعاشر من جمهوريته يعري المسرح بوصفه عالما زانفا يعج بالأخيلة التي يتوجب على المرء ان ينبذها ويتمسك بعالم الحقيقة، الا ان هذا لا يعدم الأثر البالغ الذي تركته أرائه على المسرح، قديمه وحديثه، تجربةً وتنظيراً. إن حكايته الإستعارية للكهف، والتي تعد مسرحاً للأفكار، إن هي إلا وسيلة ينفذ من خلالها الى جوهر المسرح. لذا فان مسرحية ونظرية الكهف قد اصبحت حجر الزاوية في ما قد اصطلح عليه لاحقاً بما وراء المسرح. إن ما وراء المسرح بمحمولاته الافلاطونية قد أخذ يشكل ملامح الحداثة في الفن والادب ويتصدى لقضايا على صلة بالفلسفة والعلوم التواصلية وعلم المعرفة، هذا بالإضافة لعلم الجمال. إن ما وراء المسرح يعيد طرح التساؤلات التي اثارها الكهف الافلاطوني ويعطي الجمهور بدائلاً للحقيقة، الأمر الذي يجعلهم يبحثون عن الاجوبة بانفسهم. إن عمل الكاتب المسرحي لويجي بيراندلو بمعضمه يزخر بما وراء المعنى الافلاطوني. إن الادب والفن المسرحي لدى بيراندلو يحض المتلقي ليتمعن في أوجه الحقيقة وذلك بجعله واعياً بخفايا الفعل المسرحي. في مسرحيته " ست شخصيات تبحث عن مؤلف" يحاول بيراندلو أن يعيد مسرحاً الأخيلة لذلك الكهف الافلاطوني. عبر سيره لأليات المسرح، تتخلق في عمل بيراندلو شخصيات تتمتع بحرية التنقل من أطر الحياة لأطر الشكل ومن هذه الأخيرة لأطر الواقع.